

CONTACT:

IS ZERO WASTE POSSIBLE?

The phenomenon is spreading around the world. Australia, Ireland, England, India, Korea, Germany, Namibia, Brazil - to name just a few - have embraced it, as have cities and towns across California and Vermont. Even some businesses, Wal-Mart included, have programs in place. It's Zero Waste and it's popularity is extending to the Bay State.

Zero waste is a new way of managing our waste. Instead of seeing used materials as trash in need of disposal, discards are seen as valuable resources. A pile of trash represents jobs, financial opportunity, and raw materials for new products. It's the idea that we can design, produce, consume and recycle products without throwing anything away. It's the notion that industry should mimic nature in that nothing is truly "wasted."

Zero waste isn't a new idea, but it is viewed by some as a radical one.

Companies like Patagonia have been practicing the zero-waste concept for years. In 2005, the company launched the "Common Threads Garment Recycling Program," through which customers can return worn-out garments from several product lines – Capilene® Performance Baselayers, Patagonia fleece, Polartec® fleece from other manufacturers, Patagonia organic cotton T-shirts, and others – to Patagonia for recycling.

Wal-Mart established a long-term goal of zero waste as part of its program to grow greener. They hope to reduce solid waste from its U.S. stores by 25 percent in the next two years. According to CEO Lee Scott, the reasoning is simple: "If we had to throw it away, we had to buy it first. So we pay twice, once to get it, once to take it away." To Wal-Mart, less waste means lower costs.

Getting to zero waste will take time. Most businesses, including landfill operators and packaging manufacturers, prefer the status quo.

Massachusetts has some of the highest disposal costs in the country. This leaves the doors of opportunity wide open for communities to embrace the concept of zero waste and to potentially save millions of dollars in averted disposal costs. The Commonwealth spends an estimated \$52 million a year – paid for by your taxes – to dispose of paper that could have otherwise been recycled and not wasted. That alone is reason to consider the zero-waste option.